

Matthew 5:17–48

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[0 : 0 0] Matthew chapter 5 verses 17 through 48. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pin will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, Raka, is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, you fool, will be in danger of the fire of hell. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them. Then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way or your adversary may hand you over to the judge and the judge may hand you over to the officer and you may be thrown into prison. Truly, I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. You have heard that it is said you shall not commit adultery.

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. It has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must first must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it is said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made. But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

All you need to say is simply yes or no. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one. You have heard that it is said, it was said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile with him, go with them two miles. Give to one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the children of your father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rains on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?

Do not even pagans do that. Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you.

You know, I don't know if you attend church regularly, but we find that the public reading of God's word is continually shrinking. And we depend entirely on the private reading of the word when we're at home. But one of the things that Paul actually said to Timothy was to devote yourself to the public reading of the scriptures and to teaching. And so it is not unusual, and you'll find that if you keep coming along to Christ Church Chicago, to be standing for a reading that might take nine or 10 minutes. It is the public reading of the word into our midst this morning that God would have us pay attention to. And it's wonderful just to hear it read, and just to allow that word to verbally come over you, audibly come over you, and then to sit and give ourselves to it. You know, we're in the midst of a fall series called A Vision for Christ Church Chicago. I suppose it's a good time for us to consider what is the vision of our church. After all, May 3rd, we covenanted together as a new church, a new beginning, as it were, after years of labor. And in a few months' time, we'll be in a new building, in a new neighborhood. And it seemed like a wonderful moment to sit for a bit and consider the vision of Christ Church Chicago. And for that, we have selected this first wonderful body of material in Matthew's gospel, given the name, the Sermon on the Mount. It's really his first lessons for his new community. And so as he gave his future followers his vision for what Christian community is and should look like in the world, I can't think of a better place for us to be. And today, we arrive at our third sermon from these verses. We started a couple of weeks ago, if you remember, looking at the Beatitudes.

[6 : 43] We really called it a family portrait. We know those Beatitudes stand as individual units, but it's almost as though they rise as personages gathered together in portrait. This is what his community looks like. They were those to whom the kingdom belongs. And so we spent a week looking at the portrait that ought to be defining and describing us, our posture before God, our efforts in this life, our trust in him, even when persecuted. Last week, we went from the family portrait of who the church looks like to two word pictures that talked about the work God has given us to do as Christ's church.

He's given us to do the work of salt and light. We're here to delay the decay, and we're here to enlighten the world. Who we are, the work we are given, today it's fairly clear the word we're going to follow. What word will Christ's church Chicago follow? And for that, Jesus gives us two things in this text. I can summarize it in these two things. He gives us an education on the word, and then he provides his expectation for us from his word. An education, his expectation, all to help you and me together walk as Christ's church under a covenanted word. The education comes in verses 17 through 20, and an education is important. After all, we all know where to give ourselves to Bible reading, but many of us have never been taught how to read the Bible or read the Bible well. And so Jesus is now saying, when it comes to the word that my followers will be living together under, let me give you an education.

And he does so with these four wonderful principles, principles that will help us in our life as we go forward. The first one, right there in verse 17, do not think that I've come to abolish the law of the prophets. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. First thing he'd have you know about the word that we follow as Christ's church is that there is a dynamic connection between the living word and the written word. There's something going on in our life together where we give ourselves to Jesus and the scriptures. In fact, he says he didn't come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. You might almost say that he's defending his own use of the word. Do you remember last week he told his followers, you are the light of the world. Well, up until that point, Israel had always been called the light of the world and Israel was the light of the world even in the Old Testament scriptures. But what Jesus was now saying that

God's people pre-ordered in the nation of Israel that had become the light of the world were now represented in his followers. And that great transference began to have people say, well, how does he handle the word? He seems to have an arbitrary use of the word. He does with the scriptures what he wants to do. And he says, no, let's get this straight. I didn't come to abolish it, but to fulfill it.

You and I need to remember that there's a dynamic connection between Jesus and the scriptures. And it's this connection of fulfillment. Do you see it there? I just want to highlight it along two simple lines. All the law and the prophets point to him and all the law and the prophets are properly interpreted by him. He is the final climactic movement of the scriptures and he is the final arbiter on the meaning contained in the scriptures. He completes them. He fulfills them. And isn't it wonderful to know that all the scriptures point to him? All those things about keeping the law, you know you cannot do, but he fulfills for you who are his followers. But in the context here, even more importantly, perhaps, he is the one who properly interprets the scriptures. He's not abolishing them in his teaching. He's not setting them aside and doing what he would like to do with them.

[11 : 58] He is the final arbiter on the fullness of what it really meant. We follow the word of Christ from the scriptures. I suppose then this ought to be a hallmark of our life in the future. This is part of our vision. We have to learn how to read the Bible with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the unifying interpretive center of the scriptures according to the scriptures. That's the way we're going to try to be learning to read them. But we're going to be giving ourselves completely to his understanding of them.

Well, the second one he lays down in regard to what word he wants us to follow is found in verse 18. Not merely that he is the fulfillment of them, but rather just because he has come, it doesn't mean that everything in the scriptures is now done. Take a look at it. For truly I say to you until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. I have come to fulfill it and it is though I have come still being fulfilled. Let me give it to you in street level terms by way of implication. There are some people who say, I follow Jesus. I have a high view of Jesus and a low view of the scriptures. And what Jesus is saying, that's an absurd notion for a local church to be trying to live under. You cannot have a high view of the living word and a low view of the word written because that which he fulfills is yet to the very end of the age fulfilling, accomplishing.

And so we ought to be men and women and children who give ourselves together to an understanding of the word that in it we might continue to accomplish all that it means. I just think this is a wonderful idea. We ought to be a people that are always training to know it and understand it to the best of our ability and to not set the Bible aside because I follow Jesus. More and more you will see over the next 20, 30 years individuals who subjectively have a relationship with one they call Jesus but objectively dismiss any relationship to inscripturated text. And Jesus says, get this right in the school of the word, in the education I'm giving you, I fulfill it and it is yet being accomplished. And we will be a church that gives ourselves to the word of Christ and the ongoing inscripturated text to the best of our understanding. We will love him and we will love his word.

Third, and this is something for our training, this verse 19, particularly for people like myself and others in our church who will teach the word at Christ Church Chicago. Listen to the encouragement but the kind of reality he provides to people in the local congregations who are supposed to be handling the word.

He says in verse 19, Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[15 : 59] There's a reward here, but the reality of keeping our local church on their feet. We are not to be relaxing even the least of the things we come to understand the scriptures to teach.

And this is a particular pressure upon local churches to relax the teachings of the scriptures. And so he says, don't relax them and don't teach others to relax them.

In fact, the degree to which you work hard at getting it right in Sunday school class or getting it right in community group or getting it right at your dinner table or getting it right in your conversation with one another, you need to also know that we hold ourselves to a high, high standard.

of honoring what it really says. It's God's truth. And it ought to be loved by us, cherished by us, never lowered by us.

And we never should be teaching others that everything's okay if you disregard what the Bible has to say. In other words, this church ought to be marked as a people who work hard at being faithful in their teaching, but living with fidelity in our living.

[17 : 30] We ought to be calling one another to a full knowledge of the word and a life lived in fullness to that word.

And the reward is he'll be called great in the kingdom of heaven. He will look upon Christ Church Chicago and pronounce a benediction or not, depending upon those who teach this word here at their homes, at their dinner tables, in their Sunday school classes, in their friendships.

And he will hold us accountable in the kingdom of heaven according to our ability to not relax and to faithfully live under. The fourth thing in the education is right there in verse 20.

Not only is there great information happening here, but there's a warning if we as a church should fail to exceed the basic teaching of scribes and Pharisees.

He says, For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never even enter the kingdom of heaven. He's like, there's going to be people that are great in the kingdom, and there's going to be people that are least in the kingdom, and it's going to be in some relationship to how they handle the word and live under the word.

[18 : 47] But know this, don't fall under the bar of the Pharisees and the scribes, because they don't even get into the kingdom. They reject God's word by an effort to justify themselves.

And in trying to justify themselves before God, they fail to understand the word of God, and we are to allow the word of God and the living word at the cross to justify us in his presence.

He has done all things for us. Everything you need is completely done by Christ. And yet your righteousness must then therefore exceed everything that they just put forward by thinking they were following the rules along the way.

Your love for others is a manifestation of your love for Christ. Your love for Christ is an understanding that he's given everything for you. Your righteousness exceeds them both by what you will do for Christ and by what you believe Christ has done for you.

An education on the kind of word we need to be following. But what's his expectation? I mean, I don't know an educator that doesn't have expectations of their students.

[20 : 13] Jesus may have just let down four or provided four principles for you, but his expectation for you is put down in a single line.

Here's his expectation for us, the very final line. Verse 44, I'm sorry, 48 of the reading. You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

That's his expectation. Now I'm aware that there are a lot of people from the Reformation on who have read that verse, been perplexed by it, and said it can't possibly mean what it means.

And so they are going to argue that all of these six paragraphs where Jesus is taking the word written and then explaining the fullness of it through his own voice is for them an indication that since you can't do this, you'll need to look to Jesus who will.

I don't think that's what's going on here. I think this is his expectation for Christ Church Chicago. So what does he mean by it? If it's true, how do we understand that truth?

[21 : 22] The word perfect is important. It comes with the connotation of that which is complete. The idea in my mind that picks up on it most easily for you would probably be that which is fully formed.

You are to be fully formed. You are, let me put it even in a simpler way, mature. His expectation of you is that you would be complete, that you would be a fully formed local church, that you would be a mature church as your heavenly Father is fully formed, that you won't be adolescent-like forever, that you will grow up, that you will make progress, that as you understand the word of Christ, you will increasingly live under that for Christ.

In all of its fullness. That's what I think he means. This is his expectation. Now, in that sense then, you need to think in these terms.

You and I are not able to keep the law. We don't keep the law. How can you keep the law? But you can know that Christ has kept the fullness of the law.

And if that which you cannot keep, he has kept. If you are in him, you can fulfill all that that law requires. It is the law of love.

[22 : 58] It is the law of our Lord. It is the word of Christ. It is his spirit within me that now enables me to fulfill things that are loving, even though I never kept love completely.

And so we're to fulfill God's word by living out the word of Christ. And you can do this.

In fact, the expectation in the text is that you're supposed to be doing this. Just look at some of the units that he speaks about from the law. Anger or lust or divorce or oaths or retaliation or love of enemies.

When he does the thing about anger, you've heard that it was said of those of old, you shall not commit murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

He does not follow that with saying, thank God I came to do that for you. No, his expectation is, if that's the state you find yourself in as one of my followers, leave your gift at the altar and go be reconciled to your brother.

[24 : 06] Go do this word. In other words, his expectation is that you would be actively engaged in accomplishing this word. It's the same thing there for lust.

Once you understand that you cannot keep the law entirely, you can fulfill the law of love by covenanting in relationship in the way where you put things around you.

I mean, he's speaking here drastically of do whatever it takes to make sure you don't stay in that condition. Put some controls in place in your life. Get some accountability structures out there.

I mean, gouge it out. Do what it takes to not continue doing that. It's an expectation that you will become fully formed.

Mature. The part of growing up is what we're going to be doing together over the next years. When it comes to oaths, he says, basically, the truth is, do what you say you're going to do.

[25 : 17] That's his expectation. Don't tell me all the things that you're swearing under about what you will do or might do or won't do and then you covenant to do. You know, you're better off just doing it.

Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. Whatever God says he does, you, his child, start making progress in doing that too.

And I love the last one, the love of your enemies. We often think that the Christian ethic ends with love your neighbor as yourself.

And Jesus says, well, let me get into the heart of the matter, not just your external conformity to these things. The heart of the matter is you actually love your neighbor as yourself and the fullness of that command means that you love even your enemies.

That's what we ought to be like. We ought to be a congregation marked by graciousness, concern, care, love for all who disagree with us.

[26 : 24] We shouldn't be retaliating. This is a wonderful ethical thing here. We shouldn't be stingy in regard to what we have. We ought to be marked by generosity. If somebody asks us for something, we need to give them.

And we need to give them in abundance to what they have asked. You've heard that it was said that you repay people evil for evil. But I'm telling you, you ought to start making payments beyond the good that they could have ever expected you to give.

These are the marks of Christ Church Chicago. What an education on the word.

Let's work hard. Let's work hard at keeping Jesus as both the climax of the scriptures message and the center of that message.

Let's work hard at keeping Jesus as both the scriptures. Let's work hard at knowing that while I love him, I still have a high view and love of the scriptures.

[27 : 31] Let's have every Sunday school teacher, every community group leader, every elder, every deacon, every parent, every friend, whoever goes into a discussion with another person on the word, working hard to get it right and live it out, knowing that the reward is great.

And let's make sure that we're never trying to justify ourselves before God, lest we fail to even enter into his home at the end of time.

And may we, by his grace, fulfill his expectation. May he look down upon our church two years from now and say, well, they're more fully formed than they once were.

Ten years from now, they're actually becoming quite a fully formed place. Fifty years from now, if you want to look for maturity in a local church, look to the place at Christ's church, who give themselves to the living word by attending their lives to the written word in both the fidelity of their life and their faithfulness to all that is taught.

And if that is what we do, if that is the kind of word we follow, many, many will come to know him and we will save them and ourselves by persisting in it.

[29 : 05] Our Heavenly Father, we give ourselves to these three lessons so far for your Christian community. As we think about a vision for our own life together, help us to stare down that family portrait given to us in the Beatitudes and help us to see the kind of people we are in Christ, those to whom the kingdom belongs.

And for those who have never been in that family portrait, give them mourning and seeking of righteousness and a desire to be numbered among your own.

Grow our family portrait, we pray. And Lord, thank you for the clarity of the work you've given us to accomplish.

May we never lose our distinctiveness and may we always be enlightening the world unto the glories of the gospel.

And Lord, in a day where everyone does what's right in their own eyes and everyone follows a word of their own making, help us to live under the word of Christ and help us to fulfill your expectation of us.

[30 : 29] Make us mature. In his name, amen.